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PUBLIC RELATIONS IN MUNICIPAL INSPECTION PROGRAMS

What special problems do inspectional agencies face in their public relations? What opportunities do they have for improving their personal contacts with the people they serve?

Municipal inspection agencies enforce laws. To a greater extent than most city departments, they deal directly with people in high-interest, high-intensity situations. These contacts normally occur under conditions not duplicated in other municipal employee-citizen meetings. These circumstances bring both the problems and opportunities that are the subject of this report.

The approach taken in this report is one which recognizes the common public relations problems of inspectional agencies. Except for purposes of illustration, it deals with no specific type of agency. While the problems of the fire inspector may be different in detail from those of the housing inspector, the principles and recommended practices presented here will work equally well for both.

The information in this report is directed primarily to top level administrators — department heads and chief administrative officers — who give direction to both inspectional and public relations programs, but it will also be of value to field inspectors.

Background

Inspection as an enforcement device has come into common and widespread use only recently. This increased use parallels rather closely the expansion of problems associated with urban growth. Inspection is a mechanism for the specialized surveillance of complex and frequently highly technical fields in which the enforcement officer must be well grounded in law and technology. Inspection is a technique especially suited to deal with those urban problems that have been attacked through codes and ordinances. In such areas as fire prevention, food processing regulation, and building construction, among others, the primary consideration is not punishment of violators — it is to prevent violations and to ensure correction of dangerous conditions before they can cause widespread damage to people and property.

The inspectional environment is shaped by several conditions:

1. The inspectional agency wields the municipal police power. Within his assigned field, the inspector is first of all a policeman. He is, however, a special kind of policeman.

The ordinary policeman — the man in blue on the beat — is the result of an entirely different kind of development. He is a symbol of the strength of society. He exists to apprehend the violator. His need is universally recognized. In many ways he is a symbol of punishment; undeservedly so for it is the courts which punish.

By way of contrast, the inspector possesses none of the visible signs of authority. In many cases, the need for his presence is neither universally desired nor understood. The rationale behind the laws he is charged with enforcing often is not appreciated by those expected to comply.

2. Typically, the inspector deals with a small clientele. The regular policeman is at hand or available on short notice. He is prepared to assist anyone at any time and is expected to do so. The inspector, on the other hand, does not come into contact with what might be called the "general public." Typically he works with a small group: the repeaters that continually require inspection

plus a relatively small number of one-shot "customers." The building inspector, for example, will deal with a relatively small group of contractors, developers, and architects. Among the rest of the community he confronts only those who are, as individuals, adding to or altering their buildings or who have permitted them to deteriorate to the point of public peril. Even area-wide or "household" inspections tend to be concentrated in relatively small areas of the city.

3. His job exists to benefit the entire population, but few realize it. The community-wide benefit of the inspector's work is not always readily apparent to the general public. The average citizen may have a hazy knowledge that the city is responsible for "doing something" in a particular field, but unless the house next door is falling apart (or some similar situation in which he has a direct interest) he will not personally use the inspector's service. Even then the average citizen frequently has misconceptions about the inspector's authority to act in a given situation.

Inspection as an Enforcement Technique. These three conditions do much to shape the public relations problems of inspectional agencies. Citizens often tend to be hostile toward regulation, and regulation for the sake of regulation alone is repugnant. Citizens demand that there be a demonstrable and overriding public good arising out of any suggested law. It is incumbent upon any municipal government therefore to show that there is a need for a regulation. Given a lack of understanding of the purposes of regulatory legislation and, for most people, a lack of direct contact with it, it is not surprising that each city has had to proceed slowly into these new regulatory areas.

The inspectional services of one city may differ markedly with those of another. This may stem from variations in which each defines its problems. In one community, deteriorating housing may have brought into existence a strong housing code. Another may have felt no serious urgency to enact such a code, and it has none. But even within a single city, public attitudes toward one inspectional agency usually differ from those of another. Largely because of the easy recognition of the hazards of fire, not only to the law violator but to those near him, fire inspectors typically are able to secure better cooperation than other kinds of inspectors.

Thus each city's enforcement activity will depend on the extent to which its citizenry and their elected officials have discerned a problem and the extent to which they have acted to meet it. This provides a basic framework for the public relations activities of the inspectional agency.

Prevailing Inspectional Policy

There has arisen in the inspection function a common attitude toward the manner in which inspections will be conducted. This might be called the "prevailing inspectional policy." It is so generally in use and has proved so effective, that it seldom is questioned any more. Without implying in any way that the law is compromised, this policy says in effect: The objective of inspection is to obtain willing compliance; therefore, education and guidance are the prime services which the inspector performs. The mechanism for punishment exists, but it is to be used with reason and restraint.

How is this approach carried out? This depends on the attitudes and abilities of the inspector, not only in areas requiring technical competence but also in human relations. It depends too on the adequacy of the laws he is expected to enforce, the assistance and guidance he is given by his superiors, and the public relations resources available to him.

The whole inspectional mechanism is geared toward the end that the inspector shall assist in any reasonable way the owner or operator to comply with the law. The system of "notices" which informs the owner or operator of the violation recognizes that rules are of complex nature and are unwittingly violated more often than they are deliberately violated. The system permits corrections within a reasonable period of time except where an immediate hazard exists. Before the law's punitive sections are applied, the owner or operator has had frequent warnings and often opportunities to appeal to an administrative review agency when orders are applied.

This system works. Numerous inspectors — in various fields — have testified to the effectiveness of reason and restraint in enforcement. This policy has resulted in a high level of enforcement. It is significant that the enforcement of laws involving inspectional agencies causes a low percentage of court cases. When a case does result in criminal proceedings, it usually means, in the opinion

of the inspector, the city's legal counsel, and in some cases an administrative review agency, that there have been repeated and deliberate violations of the code by the person cited.¹

In the words of one standard guide to inspection services, the inspector must be "part reporter, part technical consultant, part missionary."² This three-fold function must be carried out if the prevailing inspection policy is to work.

Public Relations and the Public at Large

Figure 1 suggests in highly abbreviated form some of the different publics that four kinds of inspectional agencies might come into contact with. They are arrayed according to a rough scale of intensity of interest in the inspector's work. For example, the Primary 1 level is limited here to those persons actually regulated. The Primary 2 level includes those immediately interested in the work at hand, while Primary 3 would be those who are less interested in the individual case than they are in what the case means in terms of "the big picture."

The levels tend to overlap in terms of intensity of interest. The occupants of a slum dwelling who might be forced to move are just as keenly interested in the housing code as are the property owners. In any situation some "publics" are more interested and involved than others. This ranking on a scale of interest is highly mobile. For example, the general public may be aroused by a disastrous fire in or collapse of a substandard building. Its interest may be higher as a result; typically the inspectional agency (whether it be the fire department, building department, or housing department) will be under greater scrutiny, at least for a time. Similarly, the professional societies or neighborhood groups will be interested in a specific case — usually one that breaks new ground — and would move up on the scale of interest.

The utility of ranking the known "publics" on such a scale stems from the fact that the public

Intensity of Interest		Type of Inspection			
		Building	Fire	Housing	Food
High	Primary 1	Property owners	Property owners	Property owners	Processing plant owners
	Primary 2	Contractors, developers, architects	Occupants, users of building	Occupants	Employers, customers
	Primary 3	Real estate board, professional societies	Insurance agents, chamber of commerce	Neighborhood groups, real estate board, racial or ethnic groups	
Medium	Secondary 1		News and information media		
		Industries	Industries, businesses	Social agencies	Retail outlets
	Secondary 2	Product distributors			
Low			The General Public		

Figure 1 — Hypothetical Publics of Inspectional Agencies

¹Proceedings against individual violators should not be confused with the body of law that has resulted from court cases in which the constitutionality of various kinds of codes has been challenged.

²Horatio Bond, editor. *NFPA Inspection Manual* (Boston: National Fire Protection Association, 1959), p. 1.

relations resources of any inspectional agency are limited. For example, educational efforts aimed at the general public would probably require a campaign involving outlays for printed materials, the allocation of time for public speeches and broadcasts, and for the organization and development of the campaign. In most cases, cities simply do not have, or will not choose to use, funds for such a campaign. In some cities efforts to conduct a broadly based campaign of public information have not achieved even a minimum goal. This does not mean that such campaigns are not valuable under certain circumstances. The continuing fire prevention educational campaigns, for example, undoubtedly have had some level of success that makes their continuance worth while.

In deciding whether such a campaign is called for, the persons responsible should ask these questions:

What is the minimum amount of money and time that will be required to achieve a specific educational goal?

Does the city have these resources?

If so, can the same or lesser resources achieve greater success with a different type of program?

Do the answers to these questions produce substantial evidence that the widespread type of public information and education campaign will be successful? If not, then sights should be set much more narrowly. The first impulse when confronted with a void of information or response among the public is to undertake a massive educational campaign. Usually this results in printed brochures for wide distribution. Because of insufficient funds, the brochure may be unattractive, and it is easy for the public to toss it aside. Because the persons preparing it are not trained in communications, it frequently will contain the exact wording of the law — because of the legal language, the effect of the law is obscure — and again it is easy for the public to toss it aside. And frequently, because no thought has been given to how the printed matter will be circulated (circulation costs money too), most copies gather dust in the city hall.

The main public relations problems of inspectional agencies are these:

1. Defining the publics it deals with. Such a definition should be developed in detail along the lines suggested by Figure 1.

2. Allocation of Resources. Assume that the city has \$100 for public relations activity.³ It costs 10 cents per copy to have a modest technical brochure prepared. This means money is available to prepare 1,000 brochures. Assume that 3,000 property owners are at Primary 1 level who should have the brochure. At Primary 2 level are 10,000 persons who conceivably could benefit from having the brochure. Obviously available resources can't hope to meet these desirable ends.

What can be done? It probably would be well to distribute the brochure at the Primary 3 level through professional organizations, neighborhood groups, and the like where there are persons with a continuing interest in the program. Announcements of the circulation through the press could result in one-time distribution of a summary of the contents of the brochure to the public at large, which would include the 3,000 Primary 1 and the 10,000 Primary 2 people.

Thus, three points can be made:

1. Each inspectional agency has its own high-interest publics.

2. The great majority of people — the "general public" — has little direct or immediate concern. The problems of inspectional agencies stem largely from the wide gap between those at the "high-interest" level and those below it. In most cases the inspectional agency can cope with its public relations problems by directing its attention to the "high-interest" groups. In this the personal contact role of the inspector is of primary importance.

³For purposes of illustration, this example begins with the money already available, but this is not in fact the proper starting point. The problem should be defined, estimates of how to meet it prepared, and then — on the basis of the urgency of the problem and the anticipated costs — the program should be prepared. Then, the program should show what funds are needed and why, *in relation to the objective desired*.

3. Mass media always should be considered as a means of distributing public information. These media — the press, radio, and television — are indispensable for informing the public. Any informational activity that fails to use mass media probably will be unnecessarily costly and ineffective. Any large-scale efforts to inform the public on broad subjects such as content of the law should always be planned by the inspection agency in cooperation with the city's public relations official, if it has one. This official can also assist in such areas as defining the agency's publics and can offer advice as to how these publics can be kept informed through the most appropriate and economical means.

The Role of the Press. The press, including radio and television, provides the best means of reaching a large number of people with information. However, such information must meet certain conditions in order to appear in the newspapers or to be broadcast.

1. The information must be of interest to the community as a whole. An announcement that affects perhaps 20 contractors in a city of 100,000 people, for example, would not meet this test.

2. It should be significant. An announcement that all permit applications must be written in ink or by typewriter is not significant, even though a good many people obtain permits.⁴

3. It must contain elements that will be read. A monthly report can be presented in statistical form, but the statistics by themselves are meaningless to most people. It is a challenge to public officials to put information in such a form that it encourages the interest of the reader.

In toto, then, the information must be newsworthy. It must affect people in more than just a passing manner. Typically, the routine activities of an inspectional agency do not qualify. While they may be significant, they are not producing other than ordinary, repetitive information.

Publicity is an absolute must on special occasions such as the area inspections for housing violations or the home fire inspection programs. Normally, such inspections should be announced for at least a week beforehand. This lets people know the inspectors are coming, and gives the occupant time to initiate his own corrections beforehand. This cuts down on the time spent per inspection during the campaign. The press always cooperates in such drives. Why? Because they are newsworthy. Newspapers and broadcasters can properly discharge their function as information media by publicizing these campaigns.

Similarly, the press usually will be willing to carry warnings of fraudulent activities where inspectional agencies have jurisdiction. For example, fly-by-night builders who ignore the local codes may descend on a community; if the inspector warns the press as soon as he learns the facts, hopefully some people will avoid paying for shoddy work and then paying again to have the work corrected.

There is one area in which the inspectional agency should be careful. That is, it should never use the threat of publicity as a lever to secure enforcement. Of course, if charges have to be filed, they probably will be reported by the news media. This can be a powerful element in the decision of a real estate developer or food processing establishment to comply. Yet the inspector should seek to obtain compliance as a result of education — not of stated or implied damage to the reputation of a businessman.

Hidden News. Very often in administrative reports there is the kernel of a newsworthy story. However, because the usual public official has little news perceptivity and the newspaperman is unable to find it in the mass of detail, the story goes unpublished.

Inspectors should continually think of ways in which to personalize or dramatize the work they do. The best approach to discovering the hidden story (and an opportunity to acquaint the public) is to search the data with questions like: How does this affect people? What does it mean in terms of safety, taxes, or regulation of individuals? Is there a typical case with whom people in the community can identify themselves?

Confidential Material. In most cases the records of inspectional agencies are public records.

⁴However, because post office pens had long been a source of public irritation, a major news story was created when the U. S. Post Office announced it would use ball point pens.

Unless there is a clear-cut law requiring that certain information remain confidential, the attitude of the inspector toward the press should be one of helpfulness.

The situation often arises where it is wise for a person or business to seek the inspector's advice before proceeding with work. This typically happens with the building inspector's office, but it sometimes occurs in other agencies. Sometimes, the visitor's plans are "leaked" to the press. Every inspectional agency faced with this kind of problem should establish a clear-cut policy to guide the inspectors or review authorities. The official should be permitted to inform the press — even where no permit has been sought — except under either or both of these circumstances:

1. There is a specific request from the person not to announce his plans prematurely.
2. The inspector is certain that the project is still in the planning stage; that is, where the project is still "up in the air."

Of course, when the party or business makes a request for a permit it is public information. Under no circumstances should the agency undertake to delay the reporting of this event, even if requested to.

Start from the Top

Good public relations begins at the top. No inspector can operate effectively, in terms of building a good image of himself, his department, and his city government as a whole, if he does not have the active help and guidance of higher level administrators. In fact, good public relations begins with the city council.

The Council Role. The inspector's ability to perform effectively rests ultimately with the law he is expected to enforce. This applies both to public relations and to specific provisions of the law. Archaic, unnecessary, or inappropriate laws may make the public relations task of the inspector impossible, but, more important, they may very well work counter to the purpose for which the law was originally adopted. For example, a rigid building code which does not permit the use of new materials of proven value may impede construction in the community.

Only the city council can take the steps necessary to insure that its objectives are met by laws currently on the books. The council of course will need the advice of the administrative staff which, in turn, should be based on the experience of the inspector. Ultimately, however, it is the council which sets the basic framework for the inspector.

This point is important in the inspector's public relations activity simply because the law tends to narrow the area in which he can exercise discretion. In many of his field trips he will find it necessary to interpret the law; its language will not be explicit enough to guide him precisely in the situation he confronts. Suppose that the city building code requires that a horse watering trough be placed in front of every theater in town. If the building inspector ignores the provision he does so in direct contradiction to the law. If he tried to enforce it, he would be laughed out of the neighborhood. Admittedly, this is an unrealistic example, but the point is the same. Inspectors should be asked to enforce good laws which meet the problems they are assigned to.

The Administration's Role. The roles of the chief executive and department heads are in many ways similar to that of the council. In the adoption of administrative regulations regarding inspectional services, they should also examine what works and doesn't work, what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, what is necessary and what is unnecessary.

Good laws are helpful to the inspector, but their limitations must be recognized. All possible situations involving the inspectional activity cannot be anticipated in ordinances or regulations. The inspector should have as much flexibility as possible consistent with good practice and his demonstrated judgement.

Perhaps the greatest contribution the council and the administration could make to the inspector is a clear-cut statement of objectives. Thus, when he is faced with the necessity to use his discretion, he will be guided to exercise that judgement in the direction of the objective. Next in importance is a staff adequate in skill and numbers to achieve this objective.

A contribution to the inspector's public relations activity will result if regulations eliminate all but a minimum of red tape. Any steps which will speed up the process of obtaining a permit at city hall will contribute not only to better public relations for the inspector but also for the city government as a whole. For example, in a medium-sized city a person seeking a building permit must first stop at the inspector's office. If his plans are approved, he is given a slip which he takes to a cashier's office some distance away. After paying the required fee, the citizen must return with the receipt to the building inspector's office to pick up the permit. While it is good practice for the citizen not to make any payment to the inspector who may visit his property, nevertheless, improvement might be made in this case. Those offices generating this kind of traffic might be placed closer to the cashier. Other actions which might be periodically considered are review of forms and paperwork generally (do they have a real purpose?); review of complaint procedures (Are complaints filed with the inspector, with no outlet for further satisfaction if warranted?); and review of duplicating or conflicting inspections.

Primarily the administration can help by recognizing inspectional needs, by assisting in setting schedules and other forms of control, and by helping to obtain adequate staffing to obtain the level of inspectional services the community needs. More specifically, the administration should give attention to the following six points.

1. Personnel Selection. The people selected as inspectors should be technically competent in the field in which they operate. This is axiomatic. In most cases, the inspector must have certain qualifications before entering city employment: the food inspector may be required to be a veterinarian, the building inspector an engineer, and so on. In other situations the inspector may be trained on the job after joining the city's ranks. For example, a regular firefighter may be used in a house-to-house, antihazard inspectional campaign. Yet, the inspector who visits industrial plants, stores, and other large structures will need special training.

But apart from technical considerations, the municipal inspector should have positive traits that enhance his ability to win willing compliance. This means that he must be able to explain the law's provisions in simple language that the layman can understand. It means that he must be willing to spend some time in explanation. It means he must be friendly, not overbearing; helpful, not domineering; cooperative, not authoritative. Such positive traits should be part of every job description for those who continually meet the public. In other words, the man or woman to be hired as an inspector should be able to put his best foot forward in behalf of the city.

2. Personnel Training. Every city employee who meets the public should have some kind of training in the public relations implications of his job. As will be stressed later in this report, personal contact generates the most persuasive and most retained impressions of the city government on the part of the citizen. This ranges from telephone habits, to appearance, to tone of voice, to personal attitudes. Public relations training serves not only to make individual employees aware of the need for proper actions but also to put into perspective the views of those whose attitudes may have hardened to the point where they are persistently hostile to people.

Training inspectors in public relations like all other training must be designed and altered to fit local needs. What is needed in every city is a careful analysis of the public relations duties of the employee, an appraisal of the present shortcomings in the performance of these duties, and the selection of those subjects and methods of training best fitted to the needs. As a general rule, inspectors should be aware of:

The importance of personal contacts and the ways to make good contacts.

The over-all activities of his department and the city government as a whole.

The art of handling citizens' complaints.

How to sharpen indirect personal contacts.

Training and calling attention to violations of ordinances in such a manner as to maintain authority and secure enforcement without giving offense.

3. Control. This is a broad topic and cannot be treated fully here. In general it means that in exercising administrative control the department head also should consider public relations

impact. Any inspection agency has limited resources. The hours of the men permit only so much time in inspections. If, in order to keep their number of inspections up to the specified demand, the inspectors don't have time to educate, then a public relations opportunity has been lost each time they hurry from one site to the next. This does not apply just to building inspectors. Sanitarians often find that restaurant equipment is adequate but is not being used properly. Such instruction is essential, too, in fire inspections. Frequently, the inspector will have to work directly with an employee, not the employer, to make sure that the requirements of the law are being met — and will be met in the future.

When inspection schedules are established consideration should be given to the quality of inspections as well as the number. Similarly, when the staffing and budgetary needs of the inspectional agency are determined, this is an important factor in the allocation of resources. If it appears that people who should know do not know the laws affecting them, then some more formal education activities should be included. The form that such activity takes will depend on the circumstances and the audience to be reached.

Some cities put relevant information — often in simple language rather than legal terminology — in brochures or leaflets. Frequently these are aimed not so much at the permanent clientele (such as builders or real estate developers) as they are at the occasional users, the layman for whom this may be his first and only contact with the inspectional agency. This is a good idea. When inspecting the premises of the occasional contact it is a good idea to leave something behind. For example, home fire inspectors may leave fire prevention literature. Administrators should determine if such material will help the inspector get his job done better and faster.

Control also relates to the speed with which service is given. Many operations — construction and meat processing come to mind — are on tight schedules, and inspections should be made at the proper time in order not to create costly delays for the businessmen. In retail establishments, inspections made at peak hours do nothing but antagonize the proprietor. When a city inspector must retain part of the goods of a store, the goods should be paid for. In these and similar matters, the role of the department head is one of ensuring that the inspection service is performed without delay and with a minimum of cost and disruption to the people involved.

4. Reducing Duplication of Inspections. Many properties or activities come under multiple inspection. Where possible, the inspectional services should be consolidated in one division or department. For example, most or all construction inspection — building, plumbing, electrical, elevator, boilers, and the like — should be centralized in one department.⁵ The bulk of the inspectional staff should be broadly trained — that is, to make all usual inspections at the typical property. For example, the building department may have a group of residential inspectors (or small building unit) backed up by specialists who handle the large-scale inspections at industrial and commercial properties. Such a system also is in use in fire departments where most firemen may be used in home inspections, but a special inspection bureau handles inspections at the large plants and public places. Such an organization requires adequate supervision in each subunit of the division or department to assure proper staff control and to provide prompt assistance on difficult problems encountered.

It is important to establish clear lines of demarcation between inspection services. A common but not necessarily mandatory solution is for inspectional teams to be sent out on complex inspections or in area inspections. The important thing is that there should be effective and continuing coordination between inspectional services, irrespective of organization.

5. Improving Work Procedures. Procedures for handling permits and plan examinations should be planned to assure prompt processing. Each step in the process should be thoroughly understood so that supervisory and technical personnel are not spending too much of their time on clerical duties. The purpose of all reports should be critically analyzed. Many reports may have little use and could be eliminated.

Three points should be observed to minimize the work involved in issuing a notice of violation.

⁵This is one example of where good administration coincides with good public relations. Occasionally there is an apparent conflict as when use of certain forms results in a lengthy application procedure. If the value of the procedure outweighs the public relations damage, it should be retained. If not, it should be abandoned.

First, the notice of violation should be written in the field on a triplicate form — copy for the owner or party concerned, inspector's copy, and office copy.

Second, if the owner of the property or party concerned is not at the same address, the notice should be delivered to him personally by the inspector in his district once the owner or party concerned is located. Mailing of the notices is desirable in some instances, but better compliance and understanding generally result if a regular inspector delivers the notice and explains the reasons why it was issued. A proper explanation may well avoid much discussion later and a possible court case which takes considerable time.

Third, notes should be made in the field on the inspector's copy of the notice. These records should be prepared with a view toward their possible use in court. Thus they should be complete and comprehensible. It is bad for public relations to lose a court case, but more often adequate records will speed up compliance and reduce the range of disputes that might arise. If the violation appears serious, a photograph of the violation may be desirable.

6. Inspection Is a Sensitive Area. Because he is a "policeman," the inspector should be scrupulous about maintaining his own reputation for integrity. Similarly, the administration should act to preserve the integrity of the inspectional agency. At one level, where the record of misconduct is notably small, this involves simple honesty. Most municipalities have rules against employees accepting any kinds of gifts or gratuities from others because of their city employment.

A more difficult problem, especially in small cities, is the problem of the inspector taking on the viewpoint of the high-intensity publics with which he comes into contact. This is a natural tendency, given the fact that the inspector is often far removed from the people his work benefits in the long run. But it is possible for an inspector to unconsciously begin to be too understanding of the regulated industry's problems and thereby to reduce his own effectiveness in applying the law. The administration can reduce the danger of this occurring by making sure that the inspector, as mentioned before, has a clear-cut understanding of the objectives of enforcement.

Inspection is an administrative tool used to enforce public policy. In addition to its safety aspects, inspection is an accommodation to the public — to see that the buyer gets full value. The inspector usually determines on the spot whether the subject conforms to the standards laid down by law, ordinance, or administrative regulations. The inspector may also specify on the spot the measures necessary to bring the subject up to standard. While aid of this nature may promote good will and raise the prestige of the inspector, care must be exercised so the inspectors will not show favoritism. This can be done by keeping proper records for the central office. In many cases the central office should send out notices based on inspection reports. In some cases the city may require the inspector to make written reports to describe the processes and conditions to be inspected. This provides the city with essential information on which later inspections can be based.

Complaints from the public must be investigated, but citizen complaints do not provide a sound basis for an inspection program. The small staff can carry out a positive inspection program even if only on a sampling, spot, or rotating basis.

In the supervision of inspection, rotation of inspectors generally is sound. There is little advantage in increasing an inspector's knowledge of his locale. The element of newness and surprise is almost as important for the inspector as for the subject.

Summation. Perhaps the most important steps to be taken in a public relations program are those taken by the inspector's superiors — the department heads and chief administrator. The quality and quantity of inspectional services depend on higher level decisions. The municipal budget, as adopted by the city governing body, reflects many policy decisions, particularly as they affect staffing and scope of the agencies' activities.

In public relations activities, too, it is up to the top level municipal administrators to help the field man recognize his public relations needs and to provide the policies and resources to meet those needs. Working by himself, the field inspector can do much to create good public relations. But his effect is bound to be limited. It is clear that good public relations begin at the top. Poor public relations begin there too.

The Inspector and Public Relations

As pointed out earlier, the individual inspector creates the greatest impact in any public relations program. While the people he meets are few in comparison with the city's entire population, they all have a high level of interest — a personal, immediate interest — in the work he does. His decisions and actions affect them, here and now. Thus any program of municipal public relations must give attention to the relations of the individual inspector with the publics he works with. This attention could be easily labeled by other names: "Good inspectional procedure," or simply "common courtesy." But it is more than that. It is a studied attempt to create personal good will among the clientele for the inspector and residual good will for the city that employs him.

Effects of Good Personal Public Relations. An inspector who achieves good public relations usually finds that his job is easier. But beyond this the inspector who is respected will have an easier time in gaining willing compliance with the law. How does one gain such respect?

1. By Doing a Competent, Professional Job. The inspector learns his field to begin with. He keeps abreast of new developments by reading technical publications and by participating in professional associations. He attends, where possible, the various meetings and conferences which contribute to his knowledge of inspectional techniques and technical problems he may face. Effective public relations are impossible without good service.

2. By Bringing a Constructive Attitude to His Job. The inspector who begins his day with a cheerful attitude and keeps it all day long is likely to be in a good position. Not that he has to "glad hand" everyone and look the other way. But the knack of being able to chat with the people he meets is a valuable trait. An inspector should be outgoing. An old grump busily looking for small infractions and cracking down as if they were major violations does no one any good. More often than not, he will make the law seem ridiculous for its pettiness when it is really the inspector who is petty.

3. By Being Fair. Good public relations require administration of regulations with understanding, tact, and restraint. But most important, enforcement should be fair. A responsible official must not shrink from citing code and ordinance violators. But in so doing he must not play favorites, overlook a violation in one place, and slam down hard on an identical one somewhere else. This requires not only rules to guide the inspector in his work; it requires a kind of philosophic outlook on the part of the inspector. The essence of this philosophy should be fair and equal treatment for all.

The concept of "fair and equal treatment" is a part of ethics. The inspector's standards of conduct on the job should include fair and equal treatment of all persons and situations. To do otherwise is unethical. The city council, the chief administrator, and department heads all share responsibility for setting ethical standards and insisting on their observance.

4. By Being Well Groomed. The inspector need not be a "dandy," but he should be dressed in a manner befitting the situation. Whatever he wears, whether it be a uniform, coveralls, or ordinary business suit, the inspector's clothes should be clean and well pressed. A small matter perhaps, but a surprisingly telling one.

5. By Communicating Properly. If a problem develops at the scene of an inspection, the inspector should be prepared to offer suggestions as to how compliance can be achieved. But this is not enough. The inspector should make sure that the person understands. A highly technical provision must be translated into simple everyday language for the layman.

Indirect contacts should not be overlooked when streamlining public relations procedures. The two principal means of indirect personal contact are letters and telephone. Letters should be answered promptly and in clear English. The tone and appearance of the letter probably have the most direct bearing on public relations. Avoid drafting letters as if they were legal documents. Telephone contacts between citizens and city officials are frequent. The person at the switchboard or information desk must be able to direct the caller to the proper person in order to service his needs.

6. By Being Courteous. An inspector should consider himself as a guest and act accordingly. If he does, it is likely that the host will not think him an intruder. An inspector who asks permission, who suggests rather than demands, who guides rather than pushes, will probably be treated like a guest on his next visit.

Some Guidelines. Here are some guidelines that have proven public relations value in municipal inspections. They are written in the personal sense as a list that administrators can adopt for their own use in employee training and orientation.

1. Make Every Inspection with a Purpose. For example, the purpose of fire inspection is to secure the correction of hazards and other violations of fire ordinances which daily create dangerous conditions. Fire inspections have a dual purpose: (1) removal of common fire hazards, and (2) familiarization of fire fighters with property where fires may occur.

If there are prior records available, look them over before making the inspection. Then you can talk in specific terms about what was found at the earlier inspections, what procedures were required, and what remedies, if any were taken. In this connection, it is essential that good records be kept of *every* inspection.

2. Plan the Day's Work. Make sure you allow time for adequate inspections at all stops. If it is an announced inspection, show up on time. In some cases, a late inspector can cost the person money. Surprise inspections should be timed so that they do not interfere with the establishment's peak business hours. If for some reason an appointment has to be cancelled or delayed, call ahead. An inspection that appears hasty will gain little respect.

3. Keep Your Balance. Don't make a big issue out of small points. Inspectors should endeavor to get building owners and tenants to correct minor hazards without making them a matter of complaint. However, all such hazards should be noted on the inspector's report so as to have a complete record. Clear-cut violations of laws, however, require a formal notice in a polite but firm manner. When the inspector discovers unsatisfactory conditions or violations of city fire ordinances, a notice should be filled in and left with the property owner. On the notice the inspector briefly indicates the hazard and how it may be remedied most economically. The conditions and violations noted should be discussed orally with the person responsible; the notice makes the procedure more formal and serves as a reminder to both parties. A reasonable number of days should be allowed for making the corrections requested. If the conditions have not been remedied when the reinspection is made, another notice similar to the first may be issued and is plainly marked "Second Notice."

4. Introduce Yourself. Unless you are absolutely sure, don't assume that the host knows you on sight. Introduce yourself to him. Make it a habit to produce identification. Allow him time enough to examine it.

5. Encourage Him To Look Too. Have someone representing the host to make the inspection tour with you. Comment and explain, where possible. It is essential to have a guide when there are valuables or loose items lying around.

6. Ask Permission. Don't start looking around until you have gained permission. And ask the boss, not the office girl. Conform to the host's requirements (such as signing in and out or wearing a company identification badge while on the grounds).

7. Don't Argue. Opportunities for education are lost when tempers rise. Use good judgement in dealing with hot-tempered people. If he won't listen, put it in writing. Take whatever action is necessary, but do it without raising your voice.

8. Wait Patiently. Don't be a scold if you are kept waiting. Your time is valuable, of course. But so is his.

9. Offer Suggestions. The inspector should not attempt to provide engineering or similar technical services under any circumstances. If the host needs such assistance, suggest that he get it. Don't say who can provide it, but offer suggestions about the qualifications of the help he should seek. And don't forget to issue warnings about any unhealthy or fraudulent practices in the community.

10. Be Kind to Animals and Children. "Love me, love my dog" is an old but true statement. Most people have animals because they want them around. Same with children.

11. Depart When Finished. When you are finished, leave. Don't hang around. After this point you are wasting your host's time, even if you are being genial about it. Don't forget to say "thank you" when you leave.

12. Keep Your Problems to Yourself. Don't discuss with your host whatever interdepartmental or personality conflicts there may be within the city government. If you do, he will believe that there is a lot of back-biting and incompetence among city employees. Incompetence always will show up. You can't shield your fellow employees from discovery of that kind. But, by airing what you know to be small gripes, you may leave the impression that every city employee is a knucklehead.

13. Stay Out of His Problems. Don't give advice unless it is directly related to the matter within your jurisdiction. Above all, don't gossip. Don't talk about what you found next door or up the street or in a competitor's place of business.

The Special Campaign

It is useful to distinguish between two types of inspectional programs: the routine, day-to-day program and the special campaign. The latter has its own public relations problems.

The special campaign is usually a high-intensity drive to eliminate hazardous violations. Often it is conducted on an area or neighborhood basis. It also can be conducted on a functional basis over a widespread area. For example, one fire inspection campaign may be directed toward the homes in a particular neighborhood, another at a specific kind of establishment (such as dry cleaning plants) because of some development (such as introduction of new materials requiring special handling or, more recently, of new conditions of operation — such as coin operated machines).

These special campaigns require extensive preparation, not only to organize the inspectional forces but also to obtain a beneficial public relations impact.

Advance Preparations. Since dwelling-house inspections must be carried out without compulsion or threat, an educational campaign is very helpful. Prior to carrying on a dwelling-house inspection campaign, the fire chief should outline his plan for civic organizations and local fire prevention groups. The active cooperation of the local newspaper is essential, and advance publicity describing the purpose of the inspections and the procedure to be followed also is desirable. The fact that it is being undertaken purely for the benefit of the city as a whole and involves no compulsion or threat to any person or property owner should be emphasized.

Where the regular inspectional forces are to be supplemented by other personnel, as in fire home inspections, they should be adequately prepared to detect fire hazards. They should be instructed in detail as to their actions. Campaign planning should take into consideration the community involved. For example, one fire department found, because of a large number of working wives, that it could not inspect a large percentage of homes during the daytime. Yet, in the early evening hours they interrupted the prime leisure time of both husband and wife. Perhaps Saturday inspections would have worked better. Seasonal factors may be considered too. Plans to abandon inspections on days when it is raining or snowing should be made (no housewife likes to clean up unnecessarily).

The procedure followed in fire inspection is simple. Two firemen call at a home and ask permission of the housewife to make a fire inspection. She is asked to accompany them. The ordinary simple fire hazards are stressed. These include such items as rubbish, ashes in wooden barrels, protection of the ceilings over furnaces, cleaning chimneys, and electric wiring. Hazards are pointed out to the housewife at the time of inspection, and corrections are suggested. Before leaving, a pamphlet on home fire hazards is handed out and the householder may be given a window card to display as evidence of cooperation in the campaign.

Note. This report was prepared by Ned L. Wall, staff member, the International City Managers' Association.